

From: VE3EPP  
To: ALL @CANADA  
Type/status: BF  
Date/time: 08-Jan 13:08  
Bid: 18191\_VE3GYQ  
Message #: 57916  
Title: P. Allen, DOC speech  
Path: IVE4KVIVE3MMFIVE3KYTIVE3NAVIVE3IWJIVE3CDYIVE3KRGIVE3OYIVE3EUKIVE3GYQ!

The following message is a speech presented to the London Amateur Radio Club by Peter Allen of the DOC on December 10, 1992 as supplied by him to Eric Pierce, VE3EPP, Editor of the LARC Bulletin. Peter has given his permission to make the speech available to the Canadian HAM community at large. Please give it wide circulation.

A couple of notable points:

The need for morse code may be completely dropped in the future. The future of HAM radio is in the hands of the HAMS, not the DOC!

This should generate some comments, lets put our heads together and see what we can ALL do (via RAC if necessary) to keep HAM radio healthy!

Eric Pierce, VE3EPP

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Amateur's Challenge for Change  
by Peter Allen, DOC, London, Ont

December 10, 1992

It is a pleasure to represent the Department tonight, thank you for the invitation.

An ancient Greek philosopher once said: "Nothing endures but change." Change is a constant in the life of all of us. And this is no less true of Amateur radio. I see many grey headed people here tonight that can testify to this fact.

Change is something that we have no choice but to accept or we'll be left behind.

The restructuring of the amateur service back in October, 1990 was one of the biggest changes that affected your hobby. Some of you may have disagreed with restructuring while some may have wholeheartedly supported it. You may or may not know that just this week, the proposed changes to the regulations that we have been following since the fall of 1990 have now become law.

The fact is, without it, the amateur radio service was in for trouble. Until two years ago, the average rate of growth of amateur stations had dropped to only about one and a half (1½) percent per year. If we were to go back further than ten years, the statistics would not be much different.

This snail's pace rate of growth was largely due to the amateur community. It was the amateurs that demanded stringent examinations so that only those who "knew their stuff" technically could become amateur radio operators. This slow growth and closed shop mentality has led to the greying of amateur radio.

Now with the new regulations in place, is amateur radio going to be a dying hobby? We hope not because you provide a valuable service in the community, especially during times of emergency.

Recent figures since restructuring have been encouraging. Over the past two years we have seen about a twenty-five (25) percent increase in the number of ham operators.

Will this trend continue? Only you can answer that question, because it is entirely up to you.

When restructuring happened we saw a lot of people, with credits in Regulations and Theory but could not pass code tests, come in and get their basic qualification. This grandfathering provision accounted for about a 7% jump in the first year. The increase last year was due to clearing up the backlog demand after implementing restructuring. However, we believe that the growth rate will revert, within the next year or two, to the low levels it was before restructuring.

Why did the DOC go through this exercise of restructuring which, by the way, was extremely time

consuming and expensive? Because it was time for change.

When you buy a car, do you need to know how many times the piston undergoes a power stroke per minute, or the gear ratio of the transmission? No. As long as the car looks the way we want and gets us from A to B that's all most of us really care about.

The same is true of amateur radio. Technology has changed a lot of things. We have come from the world of designing and building our own equipment (which you can still do if you want) to a world of buying commercially built transceivers — ready to simply "push-to-talk". As a result, amateur radio is now "operationally" oriented instead of "technically" oriented. Many people don't care to know how a superhet receiver operates, just as long as it does and they can talk to the amateur over in Europe.

Thus restructuring the examination process was necessary to keep up with the changed mentality. The old theory examinations for the amateur certificate (not even the advanced) was difficult for the person who was not technically minded or did not have the resources to obtain a lot of technical training. With the advent of commercially built equipment with excellent specifications and ease of operation, it just did not make a lot of sense not to change.

Now with about forty hours of class room instruction one can obtain enough technical background to pass the Basic qualification.

What about morse code? Many objected to the idea of a no-code certificate. But nothing new was introduced here. The old Amateur Digital certificate introduced in 1978 was a no-code certificate. Let's be honest, here too the world is changing. Thanks (or maybe no thanks) to technology, morse code is possibly on its way to becoming extinct some day.

This is reflected in the ITU regulations which changed the code requirement from 144 MHz down to 30 MHz back in 1987. The only thing now maintaining the code requirement is the safety of life at sea. Soon the SOLAS regulations, which depend on morse code below 30 MHz will be replaced by the Global Marine Distress Safety System (GMDSS) which is largely satellite based technology. When this happens we may see no need to maintain morse code qualification in amateur radio.

How will you react to this? Will you accept the changes and move on to new challenges or will you fight it? History shows that reluctance to change is only detrimental in the long run.

The challenge presently facing all of you here tonight is this: How do we prevent Amateur Radio from becoming extinct?

Very simply you have got to get out there and recruit new interest. Do everything you can to interest young people in ham radio. Advertise. Talk to people. Provide instruction, as you are doing, but be more flexible. Don't limit your training to some night time course. People are busy these days. Make it convenient for them. Could you convince the local high school to establish an after school ham club, where a station could be set up? Could you convince the school authorities to make "Introduction to Radio Theory" a part of an electrical/electronics course? Could you set up a station in a mall for a weekend and allow people to operate it? The possibilities are limited only by your imagination.

It's all up to you.

There is one other consideration. Don't expect a lot of help from the Government. As you know people are demanding less government these days. And with less government comes fewer services. This means that you are going to have to accept the responsibility to ensure that amateur radio does not go the way of the rain forests.

There's much to be said in the saying "United we stand, divided we fall". I encourage you not to quarrel amongst yourselves or other clubs, but cooperate and let your personal interests and ideas be known and thus contribute to the advancement of amateur radio. Supporting a national organization is an ideal way of accomplishing much good.

I know that many individual amateurs do not support the idea of a single national amateur organization representing them, but in these days of government restraint it is the best way and maybe the only way to ensure the survival of amateur radio.

Thank you.

Peter Allen

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